

NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

Chapter 9 – Tuning Your Mind for Meditation

This chapter goes into more detail about focusing the mind so that it is bright, alert, and unwavering. We need two qualities:

- **Intense clarity** – where the mind avoids the extreme of drowsiness and laxity, and
- **Unwavering stability** – where the mind avoids the extreme of excitement and distraction

General Tips

The Dalai Lama recommends a life of moderation. Various extremes will show up in meditation, either in the body or mind. Don't overeat or under-eat, oversleep or under-sleep.

Before the session, try to make sure that your body and mind are not uncomfortable. If you feel sleepy, then take a quick nap if there is lots of time. If there is no time, then go for a short walk, or do the stretches mentioned below. If your throat is dry, then take a few sips of water. If you have to go to the bathroom, then go beforehand. If your meditation is in a seated position on the floor, it may be a good idea to stretch the body. The stretches that are good for runners are also very good for seated meditation. Key areas that should be free of tension are the neck, lower back, hips, hamstrings and knees.

Most dharma centers have meditation sessions that last between 20 to 45 minutes. When you are beginning, it is important to get a feel for a successful session. Therefore, shorter sessions are advisable in the beginning. As you become more able to stay on the object without straying into lethargy, laxity, distraction or excitement, then lengthen your session.

Be kind and patient with yourself!

Mindfulness and Introspection

Mindfulness is the ability to stay on the object without falling to the extremes of laxity or excitement. Introspection is the ability to detect when the mind is going towards one of the extremes. Introspection is like a mental sonar check, sent occasionally from a corner of the

Chapter 9 – Tuning Your Mind for Meditation

mind. It is not a constant monitor or witness. As you become more used to meditation, both processes will become easier and more natural.

More on Laxity and Excitement

LETHARGY	Description
Lethargy	Heaviness and unserviceability of mind and body from dullness. The mind feels like it is trapped in darkness. This is akin to drowsiness.
LAXITY When the mind is withdrawn inside during meditation	
Coarse laxity	The object is not clear, and the mind feels sunken or weighted down
Subtle laxity	The mind remains on the object, but the mind lacks intense clarity
Very subtle laxity	The intensity is there, but slightly lacking
EXCITEMENT An agitated state of mind, either from chasing desires, or from a general scattering regardless of object	
Coarse excitement	Your mind strays from the object and goes off into other thoughts.
Subtle excitement	Your mind stays on the object, but there is a part of the mind following other thoughts, like moving water under a frozen surface.

About the Antidotes

Apply as soon as needed. And then return to the original object as soon as possible.

Antidote to Lethargy	Description
Brightening, elevation	Brighten the object, elevate it (if it has a subtle spatial location, such as a religious figure), or pull the focus in concentrate on a particular detail. If this does not work, then switch to a subtle object that makes you feel joyous. If this does not work, then leave off the meditation and go to an elevated place or a place where there is an expansive view. This will bring more sharpness and focused energy to the mind. When you feel the mind becoming a little brighter, return immediately to the original object.
Antidote to Excitement	Description
Stability, sobriety	Lower the object (if it has a subtle spatial location such as a religious figure). Imagine the object as heavier. If this does not wor, switch the object of meditation to something that makes you feel more sober and collected, such as th eimminence of death, or how suffering comes from ignorance. You can also think about the disadvantages of the object your mind has strayed to, or the disadvantages of distraction itself. When you feel the mind becoming a little more stable, return immediately to the original object.

Levels of Progress Towards Calm Abiding

Just sitting quietly is not calm abiding. Calm abiding is the fruition of lots of directed meditative practice. One should try to cultivate the focus discussed in this chapter, also continue with the emptiness meditations. One needs both kinds of proficiency, hence the two types of meditation. And they will sooner or later come together in the direct realization of emptiness.

Chapter 9 – Tuning Your Mind for Meditation

In the progress towards calm abiding, there are stages:

On the way to Calm Abiding, and Beyond	Description
Level 1: Putting the Mind on the Object	The mind is initially able to be placed on the object, and you are beginning to notice when it is falling into the extremes.
Level 2: Periodic Placement	You are getting better at using the antidotes to put the mind back on the object.
Level 3: Withdrawal and Resetting	Mindfulness is improving. You are able to recognize sooner and sooner the signs that the mind is straying.
Level 4: Staying Close	Mindfulness has matured, so that you no longer forget to apply it. Coarse excitement is over, but subtle forms exist.
Level 5: Disciplining the Mind	Introspection now becomes stronger. Coarse laxity no longer arises. In counteracting excitement, the mind veers too far towards subtle laxity, so that the antidotes to subtle laxity are necessary.
Level 6: Pacifying the Mind	You work on the invigoration caused by the antidotes to subtle laxity, which themselves are a form of subtle excitement.
Level 7: Thoroughly Pacifying the Mind	You ward off subtle laxity and excitement because of being attuned to their early indicators. Your antidotes are more preventive than therapeutic.
Level 8: Making the Mind One-Pointed	With a little mental exertion at the beginning of the session, you are able to stay on the object the entire session without laxity or excitement without applying the antidotes during the session.
Level 9: The Mind Placed in Equipose	From the familiarity with your practice, the mind places itself on the object spontaneously without any exertion at the beginning or preventive efforts during the session. No remedies are needed.
Calm Abiding	There is a warm, tingly sensation at the top of the head. Then a feeling of mental flexibility follows from the mind staying happily on its object. Then a feeling of physical flexibility follows, that removes physical fatigue and lack of enthusiasm. Then a bliss of physical flexibility follows, which is a comfort pervading the body, enabling the body to be used in virtuous activities according to the direction of your mind. Then comes the bliss of mental flexibility, a state that is full of buoyant joy, but which then stabilizes into unfluctuating stability. This is the mark of true calm abiding. Your mind is superbly concentrated, and has the power to purify destructive emotions when joined with insight into emptiness. In meditation, physical and mental flexibility are quickly generated, and it feels like your mind is mixed with space.
Calm Abiding Mixed with Insight = Direct Realization of Emptiness	This is when the mental and physical flexibility and bliss happen during emptiness meditation (as opposed to your calm abiding meditation). The realization of emptiness, which is usually inferential, becomes direct as the mind stays on the object through the power of calm abiding. This is the end of conceptual ignorance and afflictive emotions.